

October 2019

## Great Lakes, Great Books

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### Recommended Citation

Marten Suckow, Lynette (2019) "Great Lakes, Great Books," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 52: Iss. 1, Article 16.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol52/iss1/16>

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# Great Lakes, Great Books

by Lynette Marten Suckow



**Lynette  
Marten Suckow**

We all know that National Poetry Month is in April, but each month provides opportunity to celebrate poetry. Throughout the school year, Michigan students learn many forms and structures of poetry, allowing them the pleasure of reading and writing poems. Who hasn't tried to find a rhyme for the word "orange," counted out the syllables of Haiku, or waxed poetic about an intriguing animal while using descriptive words to form the shape of that animal? Poetry is fun! The following books from the Great Lakes Great Books list include poems lined up in order to tell a story, collections of poems arranged to record historical events, descriptive poetry, and books in verse. Enjoy each one.

The GLGB committee selects 40 books each year, published within the previous two years, to encourage K-12 classrooms to sample interesting new literature. Teachers and librarians provide students with books from their grade-level lists and provide them with opportunities to vote on their favorites. Great Lakes Great Books is one of Michigan Reading Association's Student Involvement Projects, promoting active participation in the reading process by students. Look for a classroom ballot, promotional bookmarks, and a book nomination form at [www.michiganreading.org](http://www.michiganreading.org) under the Awards and Grants tab.

***THE DAY WAR CAME*** by Nicola Davies begins on a typical day in a typical house with a typical family. A young girl eats breakfast before going to school, where she attends class in the company of her friends. "Just after lunch," the noise of war edges closer, and, as war arrives, the bright illustrations quickly change to gray clouds of confusion. Separated from all that is familiar,



the girl becomes a refugee and joins a crowd of others to find safety. Davies presents a powerful story about the universal devastation of war, and how hard it is to rebuild your life afterwards. Upon finding a school, a symbol of safety for her, the girl is turned away at the door because the war left a shortage of chairs for students to sit on. There is no room for her. However, the other refugee children bring her a chair and welcome her to class. As the illustrations depict color once again, readers regain a sense of hope for an end to all wars. The writing is poetic, if not poetry, as each short sentence conveys enough emotion and information to equal an entire paragraph. The impact of this story, along with Cobb's illustrations will stay with readers for a long time.

***VIVID: POEMS & NOTES ABOUT COLOR*** (811 PA) by Julie Paschkis deftly uses brief poems to celebrate a rainbow of colors, plus many of the shades in between, completing the palette of visual hues. Our eyes process the absence of color as black, and combination of all colors as white—the exact opposite of using pigments on paper. Some poems are very short, such as, "Diving into Long Lake headfirst, in I go plummeting through light blue deep down low into indigo." Each poem is visually supported by large whimsical

illustrations that fully cover a two-page spread. Paschkis also includes an informational fact or two about each color, integrating the science of color with the artistic beauty of colors. The illustrations are vivid, as promised in the title, proving to be a feast for the eyes.

***CAN I TOUCH YOUR HAIR?: POEMS OF RACE, MISTAKES, AND FRIENDSHIP*** (811.6 LA) by Irene Latham and Charles Waters opens with the onset of classroom anxiety. When Mrs. Vandenberg assigns "The Poem Project," an activity that pairs Charles with Irene, the result is an awkward partnership between two students who share very few interests or experiences. Charles lives in a Black community, while Irene resides in a predominately White neighborhood (note that the authors' names are also Charles and Irene). Since they don't have much in common, they decide to write about experiences from their everyday lives. Separate poems are produced from their individual perspectives, showing how family culture has a huge influence on the way each child sees the world and interacts with it. Two-page spreads, illustrated by Sean Qualls and Selina Alko, feature a poem from Irene on one side, with Charles' contribution on the other side. The titles of poems by Charles are printed in black ink, while Irene's are white against a colored background. When each decides to write about buying new shoes under the supervision of very practical parents, their experiences are similar, as are dinner conversations with their supportive families. However, their relationships with other students in the classroom are challenging in different ways. They both want to fit in, no matter what their skin color is or where they live. As they write about their daily experiences, they begin to understand each other as individuals—and as friends.

***MARTIN RISING: REQUIEM FOR A KING*** (811.6 PI) by Andrea Davis Pinkney and Brian Pinkney highlights historic events leading up to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Except for "Sparkling-eyed Child," an introductory poem about Martin Luther King, Jr.'s childhood, and "Rejoice the Legacy," which celebrates the designation of Martin Luther King Day after his death, the book zooms in on events taking place from February 1 to April 16, 1968. Andrea Davis

Pinkney begins by citing unsafe working conditions imposed on city sanitation employees, leading to a month-long strike in Memphis, Tennessee. As the strike drags on and loses steam, a friend calls Dr. King to visit Memphis in order to revive the peaceful protests of mostly Black workers. Dr. King's home-away-from-home in Memphis was the Lorraine Motel, one of the few places where Blacks were allowed to rent a room, and where he was ultimately assassinated. Pinkney sets the tone for the period with a running record of the unusually bad weather that spring. Her poems are filled with foreboding and peppered with prophetic King quotes. The text is complemented by the intensity of Brian Pinkney's watercolor and ink illustrations. Notes and photographs of King's last months on earth spell out the information alluded to in poems. The book concludes with a time line of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and, more specifically, the 10 weeks covered in this book.

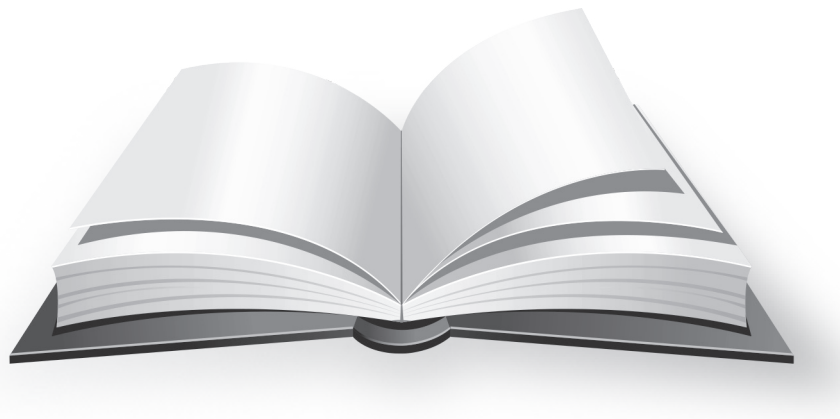
***BLOOD WATER PAINT*** by Joy McCullough is a bit of historical fiction based on the story of 17-year-old Italian Baroque artist, Artemisia Gentileschi of Rome. Artemisia lives to paint. She is far more talented with a brush than her father, who signs his name to her finished paintings before selling them, even though he insists that she, as his apprentice, should work to improve her technique. When Artemisia's father sends an established painter, Agostino Tassi, to the studio to tutor her, the atmosphere changes from educational to flirtatious to sexually aggressive. He rapes her and takes no responsibility for the incident. She's merely a woman—someone's property. Artemisia has no rights in this patriarchal society, but insists on a trial anyway, where she submits to social humiliation and physical torture to prove her innocence. This story, written in verse, switches to prose whenever Artemisia remembers her mother's retelling of Biblical stories from the perspective of resilient women, such as Susanna and Judith. Artemisia takes inspiration from these women, who were also trapped in circumstances where men controlled their lives. The idea of perspective is front and center, in the retelling of Bible stories from a woman's point of view, in the creation of paintings with a feminine eye versus that of a man, and the interjection

## Must Read Texts

of our modern-day expectations into a historical setting. Don't miss the "Afterword" for more information about this amazing artist who was born four centuries too early for her independent thoughts.

## Author Biography

**Lynette Marten Suckow** works at the Peter White Public Library's reference desk in Marquette, MI where she provides assistance with library resources and digital technology. She holds a master's degree in education from Northern Michigan University, is actively involved with the Marquette-Alger Reading Council, and has been a Great Lakes Great Books Award committee member since 2006. She can be reached at [lynette.suckow@gmail.com](mailto:lynette.suckow@gmail.com).



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